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Executive Summary

Title: The Battle of Long Island, 1776: Destined For Failure?

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Thesis: In August of 1776 the Continental Army was destined to failure in the defense of New York City due to inexperienced leadership and an under trained and undisciplined army.

Discussion The Continental Congress and General Washington mistakenly inflated the importance of New York City to the cause of the revolution. After racing to beat the British to New York, Washington committed his army to the defense of Long Island, either overlooking or neglecting its critical vulnerabilities. Hopeful of a victory in the fashion of Bunker Hill that could bring an end to the war, Washington and his inexperienced corps of generals led an under-trained, under-equipped, undisciplined force into the largest battle of the Revolutionary War against one of the most experienced armies of its time. The subsequent battle was the most lopsided defeat the Continental army suffered during the war and the destruction of the army was prevented only by a daring retreat across the East River.

Conclusion: George Washington decided to defend New York City base on potential political ramifications over military strategy. In doing so, he violated what Clausewitz deemed the supreme act of judgment that a political and military leader must make. Specifically, he failed to determine the kind of war on which they are embarking and not mistake it for, or try to make it something different. Chasing the specter of a decisive victory Washington committed his unprepared forces to an unnecessary task. The resulting defeat set the tone for the rest of 1776 and forced strategic redirection that would ultimately lead to victory.

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PREFACE

This paper was written for the purpose of analyzing George Washington's decision to defend New York City in the early stages of the Revolutionary War. I first gained interest in the subject from reading David McCullough's *1776*. What caught my attention was how the defeat at Long Island triggered the events of 1776 that left the Continental Army in dire straits at the end of the year. Attending Marine Corps Command and Staff College has provided me the opportunity to look at the Battle of Long Island in a more historical context compared to many other military campaigns and analyze the decision to defend New York City in 1776.

I would like to acknowledge the faculty and staff at Marine Corps Command and Staff College. I would especially like to acknowledge Dr. John Gordon for his guidance and counsel in writing this paper.

Introduction

During the course of 1775, the Continental Army had become emboldened by American successes at Lexington, Concord, Bunker Hill, and the siege of Boston. On March 4, 1776, the rebel forces surprised the British forces in Boston by taking position on Dorchester Heights under the cover of night. The rebels brought with them the guns that had been recovered earlier in the year at Fort Ticonderoga and transported over 300 miles of ice covered lakes, wooded countryside, and snow covered mountains by Colonel Henry Knox. With his enemy entrenched on the dominating terrain of Dorchester Heights, General William Howe, British Commander in Chief, North America, now found his position untenable and made the decision to evacuate Boston. On March 17, General Howe left Boston with 9000 troops, 1000 women and children, and 1100 loyalists.¹ George Washington, Commander-in-Chief of the Continental Army, and his generals anticipated that the British army's next move would be an invasion of New York City.

The Continental Congress and General Washington mistakenly inflated the importance of saving New York City to the cause of the revolution. After racing to beat the British to New York, Washington committed his army to the defense of Long Island, either overlooking or neglecting its critical vulnerabilities. Hopeful of a victory in the fashion of Bunker Hill that could bring an end to the war, Washington and his inexperienced corps of generals led an under-trained, under-equipped, undisciplined force into the largest battle of the Revolutionary War against one of the most experienced armies of its time. The subsequent battle was the most lopsided defeat the Continental Army suffered during the war. The destruction of the army was prevented only by a

daring retreat across the East River. This paper will examine three reasons why General Washington and the continental army were ill advised to commit to a full defense of New York City in the summer of 1776. Specifically, New York city was neither militarily nor politically significant enough to require such a defense, the leadership of the Continental Army lacked the experience in European warfare to challenge the British Army, and the soldiers lacked the training, discipline, and unity of effort to face the world's preeminent military force in 1776.

British Policy and Strategic Objectives

The policy of the British government toward the American colonies was absolute. The goal of the British was to restore harmony between the colonies and Britain, bringing the colonies back into the fold of the British Empire. In order to accomplish this goal, the British needed to overthrow the revolutionary government of the Continental Congress and defeat the rebel forces. In June of 1775, these rebel included not just militia, but the newly formed Continental Army.

Prior to the Battle of Bunker Hill in June 1775, the British image of the skill and resolve of the average rebel soldier was at best questionable. Many British officers who had fought alongside the Americans in the French and Indian War had promulgated this perception. General Wolfe, the British hero of Quebec, had labeled the American rangers as "the worst soldiers in the universe".² The defeat at Lexington and Concord had done little to change the British view of American's fighting abilities. Some Loyalists reported that if the militia had displayed any skill and courage, the worn out British would not have been able to withdraw the twenty miles back to Boston with little ammunition.

Thus, the British government was confident that the rebels would wither in the face of the regular troops in Boston, and that the revolutionary leaders could be easily dealt with.

The British needed to reevaluate their policy after Bunker Hill. During this pivotal battle, the rebel soldiers displayed both skill and courage in defending fortified positions and during their retreat. Instead of overrunning the wretched rebels, the British forces required three assault waves to remove the militia from their entrenched positions. In the process, the British suffered nearly 1000 casualties out of the force of 2200 troops that conducted the assault. The British government now decided that they must engage in a large military effort to crush the upstart Continental army and make the colonies feel the economic consequences of their rebellion. From the ensuing upheaval, the British planned to exploit the political situation to bring peace back to the Empire.³

The British wished for a quick end to the war with an exerted effort to begin in the spring of 1776. They had good reason to bring a rapid end to hostilities with the colonies. A protracted war would put Britain at risk of inviting conflict from one or both of its European rivals, Spain and France. Both nations still felt resentment toward Britain after the Seven Years War and could take advantage of Britain extending a large portion of its Army and Royal Navy to deal with the rebellious colonies. Additionally, a long war would allow the rebels to organize and receive foreign assistance in critical military supplies. In the autumn of 1775, the British government adopted the policy to send a large armed force to America to deliver a crushing blow to the Continental army and coerce the colonies back under Parliamentary rule.⁴ The question was how would they accomplish this objective.

Many in the Royal Navy believed that the best way to subdue the colonies was by naval blockade. They believed that the Americans were susceptible to such a strategy based on two key factors. First, the economy of the colonies was largely dependent on foreign trade, more so than at any other time in American history. Secondly, the colonies were reliant on trade to conduct war. In 1775 the colonies were unable to manufacture their own gunpowder or flints. Instead these critical military supplies were imported from the West Indies. Admiral Lord Richard Howe disagreed with this option. He argued that the largest navy in the world was over tasked to successfully carry out a blockade. Due to the threat of Spain and France, a large portion of the navy would be required to stay on the far side of the Atlantic in order to protect the home islands. Additionally, the navy had too many tasks in America: support of the troops, providing convoy escorts, and protecting British commerce from privateers. Finally, the American coastline was 3000 miles long. In 1775 a partial blockade had been attempted and failed to prevent West Indian planters, European traders, and even British merchants from conspiring to keep trade flowing.

Other British leaders, especially those who had experience in central Europe, favored a strategy that the Germans called *Shrecklichkeit*. This strategy advocated the uses of extreme violence and terror to break the will of the Americans. Other British officers, and the King himself rejected such measures.⁵ They kept in mind that the enemies in this war were not foreigners but instead fellow Englishmen. As General William Phillips wrote, "we cannot forget that when we strike, we wound a brother."⁶ Thus, the British adopted the policy to conduct a limited war with restraint placed on the use of violence toward civilians and private property.

Yet another idea was similar to the oil drop theory of the French Colonial theorists. This strategy called for British forces to seize small strategic areas, particularly the seaports of New York, Philadelphia, Charleston, Savannah, Newport, and Boston, and then expand them until the rebellion came to an end. This strategy would have taken too long and would have required more troops to occupy the bases than Britain could supply. Other officers proposed a variation of this strategy focusing on seizing the major corridor and river lines instead of the seaports. Of particular interest was the line of communication afforded by the Hudson River. British leaders believed that New England was the base of the revolution. By holding the Hudson River, British forces could cut off New England from the Middle and Southern colonies and the colonies could be defeated in detail.

General James Robertson advocated another plan that relied heavily on the support of the Loyalists. This plan was based on the belief of British leaders that the rebellion consisted of a minority that was led by a core of vocal and organized revolutionaries. This view was supported by the reports of many ousted royal governors, who told the British that there were a large number of Loyalists waiting for the leadership and support of the British regulars.

In the end, General Howe submitted a plan that was a combination of these strategies. As early as November 1775, he submitted his plan to Lord George Germain, the newly appointed Secretary of State for the American Colonies, who agreed to the General's plan. Howe's plan called for 20,000 troops to reinforce his army. In early 1776, with the Royal Navy's support, he would attack the city of New York City. After securing New York City, he would then venture north to wrest away control of the

Hudson River. Additionally, he proposed that 10,000 troops be sent to reinforce General Guy Carleton's forces in Quebec. The Canadian forces would move south and the two forces would meet and control the Hudson Valley. Once New York and the Hudson Valley were under General Howe's control, British forces from either his or General Carleton's army could attack the colonies in either direction. Howe believed that his plan could quickly recover Rhode Island and New Jersey, which would then give the British a strong position to offer amnesty to the colonists.⁷ In General Howe's words he was hopeful of "a decisive action, than which nothing is more to be desired or sought for by us, as the most effectual means to terminate this expensive war."⁸

American Policy and Strategic Objectives

In 1775 the Colonists were fighting for Britain to recognize their rights as subjects of England. Primarily, they were fighting against Parliament's authority to levy taxations on the colonies without any representation and the right to govern the internal affairs of the colonies without interference from Parliament. However, on the eve of the Battle of Long Island, the American policy took a drastic change. On July 2, 1776 the Continental Congress approved the Declaration of Independence. The Americans no longer saw a possibility of returning to British rule and had declared themselves an independent nation. Reconciliation between the two parties was now nearly impossible.

Strategically, the Americans may have had the simpler task. Their main objectives were to maintain popular support for the revolution, make the war costly for Britain, both economically and militarily, and achieve enough success to garner the support of Britain's enemies in Europe. With France and Spain in the mix, the American chance of success would be much better. How would the Americans proceed?

One strategy, favored by Major General Charles Lee, was to avoid major battles and fight an irregular war to sap the strength of the British army. He proposed that the army should move into the interior and engage the British with small, mobile forces under independent command. Washington viewed this option only viable as a desperate last resort due to two major shortcomings. He viewed retreat over the Alleghenies as cowardly and unable to provide the military success that would be necessary to attract foreign aid. Secondly, the effect on the popular support would be detrimental by relinquishing control of the densely populated coastal towns to the British and trusting the defense of these towns to the local militia.

Another method was to conduct a "war of posts." This would entail a series of defensive engagements and withdrawals designed to erode the strength of the British forces while avoiding a large-scale battle in the open, which would risk the destruction of the entire Continental army. This method adopted a defensive strategy that appeared to acknowledge the superiority of the British army and it would mean sacrificing the large cities, such as Philadelphia and New York, to British occupation. In the summer of 1776, this strategy was neither likely to gain the political favor of Congress nor gain the popular support of American public.

Yet another strategy that was popular with the provincial governments was a perimeter defense. This strategy would have required Washington to defend all of the colonies and every major town. The ability to post troops in all the major towns was not possible given the small size of the Continental army. Additionally, the Royal Navy gave the British a tremendous advantage in mobility and Washington could not have effectively moved large forces everywhere the British could land.

The strategy that was adopted had the highest potential for ending the war quickly, yet it also was the riskiest. Washington chose to mass his forces in a strong defensive position on terrain of his choosing. Thus, inviting the British forces to confront him in a major battle. General Washington expected that the Continental army could entice the British army to conduct a frontal assault in the same manner as Bunker Hill and hopefully with the same result only on a grander scale.⁹

Centers of Gravity

In *On War*, Clausewitz defines the center of gravity as “the hub of all power and movement, on which everything depends.” He further describes the two most important centers of gravity and the acts that are most important defeat an enemy. The first is the destruction of the army. Secondly, Clausewitz advocates the seizure of the capital or other center of social, professional, and political activity.¹⁰ The Continental Congress, Washington, and his generals, overestimated the strategic and political importance of New York to their cause of Independence.

As an example of how the American leadership viewed the political importance of New York, Brigadier General Nathanael Greene wrote “If the tide of sentiment gets against us in that province, it will give a fatal stab to the strength and union of the colonies.”¹¹ Unlike Boston, New York had a much higher Loyalist population, particularly on Staten Island and Long Island. In 1775, over half of the New York Chamber of Commerce were sworn Loyalists. Additionally, throughout the summer of 1776 the Loyalists in New York would not only hinder Washington’s ability to gain intelligence about the enemy, but they provided General Howe with a valuable source of information and an instrument to spread disinformation. Loyalist militia in the area

gladly provided full support to the British after they landed on Staten Island.

Throughout the war the British occupied the major cities of Boston, New York, and Philadelphia with little effect on the way the Americans conducted the war. Since the would be nation did not have a capitol such as Paris, London, or Austria, the Continental Congress was able to slip away and continue its operations unimpeded.

It is hard to deny that the city of New York was of significant military value. It was a center of economic activity. It would also provide the Royal Navy an open harbor to protect its ships. Throughout the remainder of the war, it was the headquarters for the British armed forces in America. However, in 1776 its most important trait was that it controlled the southern end of the Hudson River. Washington recognized the significance of the Hudson Valley corridor and expected the British to try to seize it from both the north and the south. If the British gained control of the Hudson River they would effectively cut off the line of communication between New England and the Middle and Southern colonies. However, there were other places along the Hudson Valley that were more easily defended than New York City. The deep navigable waters of the Hudson River, the East River, and the Long Island sound interweave Manhattan, Long Island, and the Jersey shore. Considering that the Continentals had nothing resembling a navy to match up against the Royal Navy, the abundance of water placed Washington's army in a precarious position. In the vicinity of New York City, the Royal Navy's superiority made the Continental Army susceptible to bombardment from the sea and vulnerable to being out maneuvered and trapped by the mobility afforded to the British forces. Washington would have been better served to heed John Jays recommendation in the late spring to abandon New York and fall back to the Hudson

Highlands from Suffron to West Point. The Highlands provided very imposing terrain for any attacker rising more than 400 feet at a 45-degree angle.¹² Moreover, the Continentals had already commenced work on new forts in this area. With control of these forts, Washington could have ruined the British plan to consolidate the forces in Canada and America. These forts commanded both the Hudson River and the overland routes between New York City and Albany, where the British planned to link up.¹³

Washington's decision to defend New York was made more out of political judgment than military strategy. He feared a detrimental effect on the American cause if he failed to meet the desires of Congress and the supporters in New York and decided to make every effort to defend the city. He failed to realize that the loss of any city was not going to significantly weaken his army or the cause. As Washington later acknowledged, nothing would have had a more devastating effect on the popular support of the American cause than the destruction of the Continental army, except perhaps the loss of the Continental Congress.

Force Structure

In 2004, American Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld said "You go to war with the army you have, not the army you wish for." These words have applied throughout history and certainly applied to George Washington in 1776. General Washington's vision for the Continental Army was a force of regular troops well trained in the art of European warfare. His army would be modeled after the finest army in the world: the British Army. Yet, in 1776 there was a stark contrast between Washington's Continental Army and the British Army that he was fighting against. In particular, the lack of experience of the officer corps and the rank and file soldiers should have

precluded Washington from committing his army in a major battle such as the defense of New York.

The fighting force, which the British sent against the nascent Continental Army, was arguably the best in the world during the summer of 1776. The experience of the British regulars was unmatched. During the period from 1755 to 1765 the British army engaged in war on five different continents and had defeated every major power that opposed them. Over the span of the Seven Years War and the French and Indian War the British had forged victories in Europe, India, North America, West Indies, Cuba, the Mediterranean, Philippines, and Africa.

Leadership

The officers of the British army were professional soldiers. The fifteen General Officers present during the Battle of Long Island were 48 yrs old on average with 30 yrs of military service. Contrarily, of the 21 General Officers on the continental side, they averaged 43 years old with only 2 yrs of military service, most of which was in the militia.¹⁴ The two most experienced officers in the Continental Army were Major Generals Charles Lee and Horatio Gates. Both had been regular British officers. Arguably the most experienced, General Lee had seen action in the French and Indian War in North America. He had been with General Braddock in the British campaign in Pennsylvania against Fort Duquesne in 1755. Additionally, Lee took part in military campaigns in Europe. He had been part of a campaign under General John Burgoyne in Portugal. Lee had also been involved in Poland's civil war as an aide and advisor to King Stanislaus Poniatowski. In 1769 he was named general in the Polish Army, however, his title appears to be more honorific, due to his relationship to the king, than a description of

command. Although he had the longest resume with respect to military service, Lee did not have much experience with field command.¹⁵ In Boston, General Lee had proved indispensable in providing training and discipline to the group of militias. He also provided guidance for engineering the defenses outside the city of Boston. Lee was selected by General Washington in January 1776 to go to New York to prepare the defenses for the anticipated attack by the British forces. Lee, however, was not available to finish the defenses at New York because Congress had selected him to lead a force to go to South Carolina and take charge of the defense of Charleston ahead of the British forces under Major General Clinton. The man whom Washington had specifically requested Congress to make his second in command and Washington considered "the first officer in military knowledge and experience we have in the whole army,"¹⁶ was not available to provide council to Washington during the crucial preparations and conduct of the Battle of Long Island.

When the War for Independence broke out, Horatio Gates had been out of military service nearly a decade. Yet, when selected by Congress in 1775 to be Brigadier General he could claim nearly fifteen years of service as an officer in the British Army. Gates, like Lee, gained combat experience during the French and Indian War. He had been a company commander under General Braddock. In the French and Indian War, Gates learned a great deal of small unit tactics yet did not have experience in large field commands. Although he saw additional action in the West Indies in 1761, Gates had more opportunities to display his administrative abilities than his leadership in combat. In Boston, Gates had quickly become Washington's right hand and was instrumental in organizing the new army, developing the army's first regulations and procedures on

recruiting and training. Gates was also a trusted voice on strategy at the Councils of War during the siege at Boston. In May 1776, Congress promoted Gates to Major General and sent him to the Northern Department.¹⁷ Thus, during the summer months of 1776, Washington was without the guidance of his two most experienced officers.

George Washington, Commander-in-Chief of the Continental Army, had much less military experience. He had been an aide to General Braddock in 1755 during the Pennsylvania campaign and again in 1758 when the Virginia militia served with the British against Fort Duquesne. His most valuable experience, like Gates, was administrative. At the age of 23, Washington was promoted to Colonel and Commander-in-Chief of the Virginia militia. When he expanded the militia from one regiment to two regiments, he gained valuable experiences in dealing with governmental bodies concerning such issues as manning, equipping, and providing for a military force. However, his combat experiences were mostly limited to small skirmishes with no opportunity to exercise field evolutions and deployment. Washington and the rest of the officer corps had little experience orchestrating large-scale movements of an army and particularly the command of cavalry and artillery.¹⁸

Soldiers of the Continental Army

For the British soldier, an enlistment was for life and the force sent to the colonies was one of the most experienced in the world. In the summer of 1776, a private in the British army had an average of 9 years of military service consisting of rigorous training and strict discipline. Comparatively, the average military experience level for the troops fighting for the cause of independence could be measured in mere months.¹⁹ This lack

of experience among the soldiers of the Continental Army manifested itself in a lack of training, lack of discipline and a lack of unity of effort.

The shortfall in training and discipline within the Continental Army was largely due its transient nature. Following the British tradition, the American people and the Continental Congress were leery of instituting a standing army due to fears of a military dictatorship. Therefore, in the early days of 1775 and into 1776, the Continental Army was mostly made up of militias and a minority whom enlisted with the Continental Army. In 1775, the soldier's commitment was usually for one year. Some militia felt the call of duty only when the British posed a threat in their immediate vicinity and would depart once the threat subsided. This situation caused many troubles for General Washington, who believed that the only way to build a force capable of defeating the British was to raise a standing army of long-term regulars, well disciplined, and trained in the line of fire warfare prevalent in Europe. In fall of 1775, Washington literally had to raise a new army, as almost all of the enlistments were set to expire at the end of the year. A vast majority of the forces around Boston failed to reenlist for the 1776 campaign. By late November, only 2,500 of Washington's army of nearly 18,000 had reenlisted.²⁰ Many of those who did not reenlist did eventually return to serve again in the Continental Army. Yet it illustrates the difficulties that Washington and his generals faced in training a professional armed force. The lack of discipline went beyond the wielding of arms, the soldiers in the Continental Army also showed disregard with respects to sanitation. The American soldiers showed such disregard for cleanliness that Nathanael Greene addressed the issue in his written orders on July 28. "The general also forbids...the troops easing themselves in the ditches of the fortifications... If these matters are not attended to,

the stench arising from such places will soon breed a pestilence in the camp."²¹ By August, it is estimated that a full quarter of Washington's army was unfit due to typhus and dysentery.²²

Beyond the lack of discipline, in the summer of 1776 the Continental Army suffered from a lack of unity. As well as springing from the transient nature of the army, the lack of unity came from the fact that the militias that constituted the army came from widespread and diverse areas of the colonies. Although they were all theoretically fighting for "liberty and freedom", in reality, this concept had a different meaning for each group depending on where they lived in America. The disjointed character of the Continental Army was exacerbated by the fact that many of the militia perceived themselves responsible to the leadership of their state more than the leadership of the united colonies. If the militia did not agree with the wishes of the Continental leadership they could just walk away from the army under the auspice that they were only bound to the regulations set forth by their respective state leaders. An example of this came in July 1776, when Washington dismissed the Connecticut Light Horse Regiment after their commander informed Washington that Connecticut law exempted the cavalry from conducting the duties of a foot soldier. These conditions hindered General Washington's ability to instill discipline amongst the troops. This was amplified by the fact that the Continental Army was preparing defenses for a major battle while still trying to train the forces.

Execution

The decision to defend New York was made as early as January 1776. General Washington had received information that the British were intending to send a large force

over to America. He came to the logical conclusion that the most likely destination of this force would be New York. Major General Lee and Brigadier General Nathanael Greene argued that due to the strategic importance of the city, both militarily and politically, that they could waste no time in defending New York. In Greene's opinion there was only one option other than defense: burn New York. General Washington, displaying his subservience to civilian authority requested Congress's approval to immediately prepare to defend New York. In a letter dated 6 January, John Adams gave his and congress's fervent agreement. Adams expressed the importance of New York calling it the "nexus of the Northern and Southern colonies" and the "key to the whole Continent, as it is a Passage to Canada, to the Great Lakes, and to all the Indian Nations. No effort to secure it ought to be omitted."²⁴ Major General Lee was immediately dispatched to New York to prepare its defenses.

Once in New York and seeing that it was approachable by water on all sides, Lee immediately recognized his task was overwhelming. In a letter to Washington, Lee expressed his concerns: "What to do with the city, I own puzzles me, it is so encircled with deep navigable water, that whoever commands the sea must command the town."²⁵

Over the next five months General Washington continued to develop defensive positions on Long Island, Manhattan, and New Jersey. His army and the civilians of New York built a series of forts (Appendix A) on the shores of New Jersey, Manhattan, and Long Island to deny the Royal Navy access to the Hudson River and East River. Additionally, obstacles were placed in the waterways to inhibit the ability of the Royal Navy to freely navigate the surrounding water seeking to diminish the threat of the Royal Navy, for which the Continental forces had no other answer. Manhattan was fortified

with the purpose of making it an impenetrable fortress, only to be taken at a dear price to the British. Across the East River on Long Island, fortifications were erected on the Heights of Brooklyn with a large contingent of Colonel Knox's artillery. If the British were able to wrestle Manhattan away, then as long as Washington could keep a formidable force on Long Island, the dominating terrain of the Brooklyn Heights would make Manhattan untenable, similar to the way occupying Dorchester Heights had forced the British to abandon their position in Boston.

Despite Continental Congress approving, in October of 1775, a standing army of up to 23,000 troops, recruitment and retention proved difficult due to the average Americans suspicion of a standing army. Washington requested additional troops from the Continental Congress and by mid August had 18,000 troops, as groups of militia trickled in from the surrounding states throughout the summer. Due to the mobility afforded to the British by the Royal Navy and the risk of being attacked on either Manhattan or Long Island, General Washington made a critical error of dividing his forces between the two strongholds. Due to his lack of cavalry and British misinformation, Washington had very little knowledge of the British troop disposition between Staten Island and Long Island. Up until the eve of the battle, he was under the impression that the British troop movement to Long Island only numbered 8,000. Fearing this was a diversion and the main attack would be on Manhattan, Washington maintained his army divided until it was too late to affect the outcome of the battle.

On the British side, General Howe had sailed to Halifax instead of New York to refit his ships and rest his men whom were weary from the winter in Boston. At the end of June, General Howe arrived off the coast of New York with his 9,000 troops. On 2

July, British Forces started landing on Staten Island. General Howe waited there for reinforcements. Over the next month, the British forces received additional troops from the wayward expedition to the Carolinas under General Clinton and the reinforcements from across the Atlantic. By the 15 August, General Howe had amassed the largest expeditionary force Britain had assembled up to that point. On Staten Island there were over 30,000 troops consisting of over 20,000 British regulars and 10,000 Hessian mercenaries. All of who were well rested and eager to teach the Continentals a lesson for their insubordination.

Between August 22 and August 25 the British moved over 20,000 troops from Staten Island to Long Island. On the night of 26-27 August, General Howe led his main force of 10,000 troops around the left flank of the Continental Army via the Jamaica Pass, which had been left nearly undefended. The Continentals were caught completely by surprise and thrown into confusion. The Continentals on the left flank, facing British forces to their front and in their rear, quickly broke ranks and retreated to the fortifications on Brooklyn Heights. Reluctant to repeat the bloodshed at Bunker Hill, General Howe chose not to assault the fortified positions on Brooklyn and ordered his troops to prepare to take the position by siege. On the first day of the Battle of Long Island, George Washington lost nearly 1000 troops captured or wounded to the British losses of only 300. Over the next two days, General Washington sent reinforcements from Manhattan across the East River to Brooklyn. On the 29th of August, General Washington convened his generals and asked them if they should withdraw their forces across the East River to Manhattan before the Royal Navy was able to cut off their only

avenue of retreat. That night General Washington directed the withdrawal of his forces across the East River and most likely prevented the destruction of the Continental Army.

Conclusion

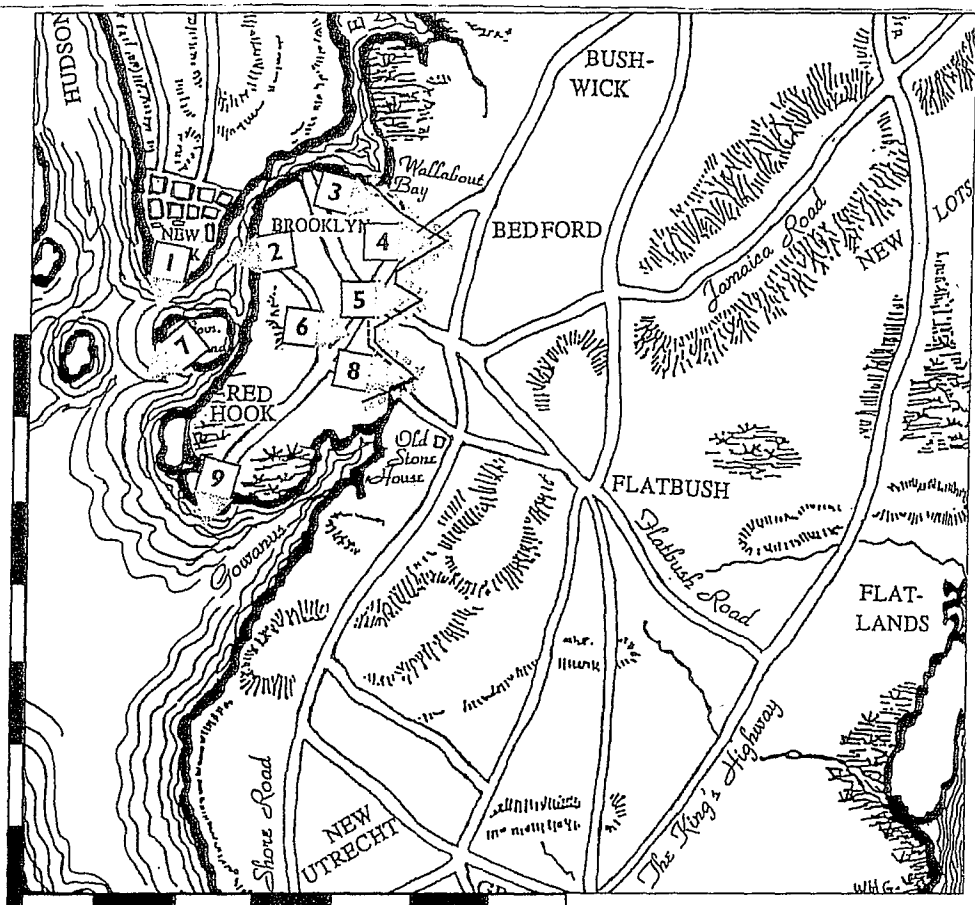
George Washington and the Continental Congress decided to defend New York City based on potential political ramifications over military strategy. In doing so, they violated what Clausewitz deemed the supreme act of judgment that a political and military must make. Specifically, the leaders must establish the kind of war on which they are embarking and not mistake it for, or try to make it something different.²⁶ This decision ignored the fact that the destruction of the Continental army would have the most devastating consequences for the American cause of independence, far outweighing the effect of losing any single city in the colonies. Anticipating that they could entice the British army into another Bunker Hill, Washington and his untested generals led an undisciplined and inexperienced army against the most formidable expeditionary force Britain had ever assembled. The devastating defeat that ensued set the stage for the Continental Army losing its foothold in New York and the desperate struggle for survival that would mark the last months of 1776.

Out of this bitter defeat came two changes that would be critical to the American cause. First, the defeat at Long Island forced General Washington to reexamine his strategy. In a letter addressed to John Hancock dated September 8, General Washington wrote that after a comprehensive review of the situation by a Council of the General Officers it was determined "...that on our side the war should be defensive.... we should on all occasions avoid a general action, or put anything to risk, unless compelled by a necessity, into which we should never to be drawn."²⁷ General Washington adopted a

war of posts. Never again would he commit his army to the full defense of a particular city and subject the Continental Army to potential destruction. This is clear in the Battles of Germantown and Brandywine where Washington permitted the British to take Philadelphia after a show of defense. Except perhaps at Trenton and Princeton, which were conducted to keep the Revolution alive, Washington did not gamble the existence of the Continental Army and chose to fight the British where and when he desired.

Secondly, Congress was convinced to grant Washington the authority to raise an army of regular troops with long-term enlistments. This allowed Washington to pursue the army he had envisioned. By having a core of regular troops, Washington was able to improve the training and discipline of the Continental Army. This core would make up the nexus of the army and could provide the anchor to the militia whom Washington deemed unreliable. The Continental Army continued to improve throughout the remainder of the war.

Appendix A



American Dispositions, August 1776

Forts:

- 1. The Battery
- 2. Fort Stirling
- 3. Fort Putnam
- 4. Ring Fort
- 5. Fort Greene

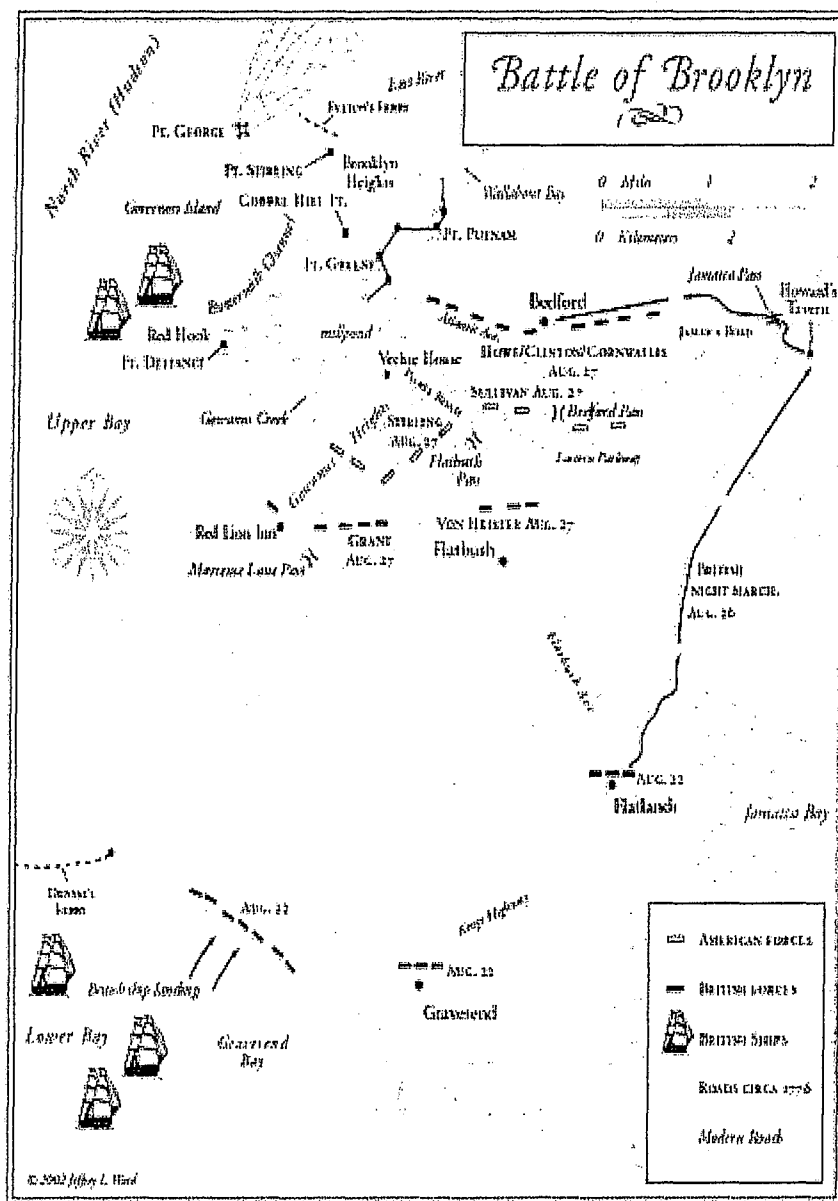
- 6. Cobble Hill
- 7. Governors Island
- 8. Fort Box
- 9. Fort Defiance

Trench Lines

Palisade added August 27th

Map 1: Disposition of American Forts in New York City²⁸

Appendix B



Map 2: Battle of Long Island, August 27²⁹

APPENDIX C:

American Order of Battle³⁰

Commander-in-Chief: George Washington

Secretary: Lt. Col. Robert Hanson Harrison, Virginia

Aides-de-Camp:

Col. William Grayson, Virginia

Lt. Tench Tilghman, Maryland

Lt. Col. Richard Cary, Jr., Massachusetts

Lt. Col. Samuel Blachly Webb, Connecticut

Adjutant General: Col. Joseph Reed, New Jersey and Pennsylvania

Quartermaster General: Col. Stephen Moylan, Pennsylvania

Commissary General: Col. Joseph Trumbull, Connecticut

Paymaster General: Col. William Palfrey, Massachusetts

Muster-Master General: Col. Gunning Bedford, Delaware

Director of the General Hospital: Dr. John Morgan, Pennsylvania

Chief Engineer: Col. Rufus Putnam, Massachusetts

Putnam's Division: Maj. Gen. Israel Putnam

Aide: Maj. Aaron Burr

Read's Brigade: Col. Joseph Read

Brig. Maj. David Henly

13th Mass. Cont., Col. Joseph Read

3rd Mass. Cont., Col. Ebenezer Learned

23rd Mass. Cont., Col. John Bailey

26th Mass. Cont., Col. Loammi Baldwin

Scott's Brigade: Brig. Gen. John Morin Scott

Brig. Maj. Nicholas Fish

N.Y. Militia, Col. John Lasher

N.Y. Levies, Col. William Malcolm,

N.Y. Militia, Col. Samuel Drake

N.Y. Militia, Col. Cornelius Humphrey

Fellows' Brigade: Brig. Gen. John Fellows

Brig. Maj. Mark Hopkins

Mass. Militia, Col. Jonathan Holman

Mass. Militia, Col. Simeon Cary

Mass. Militia, Col. Jonathan Smith

14th Mass. Cont., Col. John Glover

Heath's Division: Maj. Gen. William Heath
Aides: Maj. Thomas Henly, Maj. Israel Keith

Mifflin's Brigade: Brig. Gen. Thomas Mifflin
Brig. Maj. Jonathan Mifflin
5th Pa. Bn., Col. Robert Magaw
3rd Pa. Bn., Col. John Shee
27th Mass. Cont., Col. Israel Hutchinson
16th Mass. Cont., Col. Paul Dudley Sargent
Ward's Conn. Rgt., Col. Andrew Ward

Clinton's Brigade: Brig. Gen. George Clinton
Brig. Maj. Albert Pawling
N.Y. Militia, Col. Isaac Nichol
N.Y. Militia, Col. Thomas Thomas
N.Y. Militia, Col. James Swartwout
N.Y. Militia, Col. Levi Paulding
N.Y. Militia, Col. Morris Graham

Spencer's Division: Maj. Gen. Joseph Spenceer
Aides: Maj. William Peck, Maj. Charles Whiting

Parsons' Brigade: Brig. Gen. Samuel Holden Parsons
Brig. Maj. Thomas Dyer
17th Conn. Cont., Col. Jedediah Huntington
22nd Conn. Cont., Col. Samuel Wyllys
20th Conn. Cont., Col. John Durkee
10th Conn. Cont., Col. John Tyler
21st Mass. Cont., Col. Jonathan Ward

Wadsworth's Brigade: Brig. Gen. James Wadsworth
Brig. Maj. John Palsgrave Wyllys
1st Conn. State Levies, Col. Gold Selleck Silliman
2nd Conn. State Levies, Col. Fisher Gay
3rd Conn. State Levies, Col. Comfort Sage
4th Conn. State Levies, Col. Samuel Selden
5th Conn. State Levies, Col. William Douglas
6th Conn. State Levies, Col. John Chester
7th Conn. State Levies, Col. Phillip Burr Bradley

Sullivan's Division: Maj. Gen. John Sullivan
Aides: Maj. Alexander Scammell, Maj. Lewis Morris Jr.

Stirling's Brigade: Brig. Gen. Lord Stirling
Brig. Maj. W. S. Livingston
Smallwood's Md. Cont., Col. William Smallwood
Haslet's Del. Cont., Col. John Haslet
Pa. State Rifle Rgt., Col. Samuel Miles
Pa. State Bn. of Musketry, Col. Samuel John Atlee
Pa. Militia, Lt. Col. Nicholas Lutz
Pa. Militia, Lt. Col. Peter Kachlein
Pa. Militia, Maj. Hay

McDougall's Brigade: Brig. Gen. Alexander McDougall
Brig. Maj. Richard Platt
1st N.Y. Rgt., Late McDougall's
2nd N.Y. Rgt., Col. Rudolph Ritzeme
19th Conn. Cont., Col. Charles Webb
Artifers, Col. Jonathan Brewer

Greene's Division: Maj. Gen. Nathanael Greene
Aides: Maj. William Blodgett, Maj. William S. Livingston

Nixon's Brigade: Brig. Gen. John Nixon
Brig. Maj. Daniel Box
1st Pa. Cont. (Riflemen), Col. Edward Hand
Varnum's R.I. Cont., Col. James Varnum
Hitchcock's R.I. Cont., Col. Danel Hitchcock
4th Mass. Cont., Col. Nixon
7th Mass. Cont., Col. William Prescott
12th Mass. Cont., Col. Moses Little

Heard's Brigade: Brig. Gen. Nathaniel Heard
Brig. Maj. Peter Gordon
N.J. State Troops, Col. David Forman
N.J. Militia, Col. Philip Johnston
N.J. Militia, Col. Ephraim Martin
N.J. Militia, Col. Silas Newcomb
N.J. Militia, Col. Philip Van Cortland

Artillary: Col. Henry Knox

Long Island Militia: Brig. Gen. Nathaniel Woodhull
Brig. Maj. Jonathan Lawrence
Long Island Militia, Col. Josiah Smith
Long Island Militia, Col. Jeronimus Remsen

Connecticut Militia: Brig. Gen. Oliver Wolcott
Conn. Militia, Col. Thompson
Conn. Militia, Col. Hinman
Conn. Militia, Col. Pettibone
Conn. Militia, Col. Cooke
Conn. Militia, Col. Talcott
Conn. Militia, Col. Chapman
Conn. Militia, Col. Baldwin
Conn. Militia, Lt. Col. Mead
Conn. Militia, Lt. Col. Lewis
Conn. Militia, Lt. Col. Pitkin
Conn. Militia, Maj. Strong
Conn. Militia, Maj. Newberry

Flying Camp in New Jersey: Gen. Hugh Mercer

New Jersey Militia, Maj. Mattias Shipman
Delaware Flying Camp, Samuel Patterson
N.J. Militia, Lt. Col. Jonathan Deare
N.J. Militia, Richard Somers
N.J. Militia, David Chambers
N.J. Militia, Samuel Dick
N.J. Militia, Lt. Col. Enos Seeley
N.J. Militia, Edward Thomas
N.J. Militia, Jacob Ford Jr.
N.J. Militia, Joseph Beavers
Pa. Flying Camp, Lt. Col. Lawrence
Pa. Flying Camp, Moore
Pa. Flying Camp, Jacob Klotz
Pa. Flying Camp, Michael Swope
Pa. Flying Camp, Lt. Col. Frederick Watts
Pa. Flying Camp, William Montgomery
Pa. Flying Camp, Richard McAllister
Pa. Flying Camp, Lt. Col. William Baxter

APPENDIX D

British Order of Battle³¹

Commander-in-Chief: Gen. the Hon. Sir William Howe
Second in Command: Lt. Gen. Henry Clinton
Third in Command: Right Hon. Lt. Gen. Hugh Earl Percy

Brigade of Gaurds: Maj. Gen. Edward Mathew
1st Battalion Guards
2nd Battalion Guards

1st Brigade: Maj. Gen. Robert Pigot
Brig. Maj. M. B. Smith
4th Foot, Maj. James Ogilvie
15th Foot, Lt. Col. John Bird
27th Foot, Lt. Col. John Maxwell
45th Foot, Maj. Saxton

2nd Brigade: Brig. Gen. James Agnew
Brig. Maj. M. B. Disney
5th Foot, Lt. Col. William Walcott
28th Foot, Lt. Col. Robert Prescott
35th Foot, Lt. Col. Robert Carr
49th Foot, Lt. Col. Sir Henry Calder, Bart.

3rd Brigade: Maj. Gen. Daniel Jones
Brig. Maj. M. B. Baker
10th Foot, Maj. John Vatass
37th Foot, Lt. Col. Robert Abercrombie
38th Foot, Lt. Col. Wm. Butler
52nd Foot, Lt. Col. Mungo Campbell

4th Brigade: Maj. Gen. James Grant
Brig. Maj. M. B. Brown
17th Foot, Lt. Col. Charles Mawhood
40th Foot, Lt. Col. James Grant
46th Foot, Lt. Col. Enoch Markham
35th Foot, Capt. Luke

5th Brigade: Brig. Gen. Francis Smith
Brig. Maj. M. B. McKenzie
14th Foot, Lt. Col. Alured Clarke
23rd Foot, Lt. Col. J. Campbell
43rd Foot, Lt. Col. Geo. Clerke
63rd Foot, Maj. Francis Sill

6th Brigade: Brig. Gen. James Robertson
Brig. Maj. M. B. Leslie
23rd Foot, Lt. Col. Benj. Bernard
44th Foot, Maj. Henry Hope
57th Foot, Lt. Col. John Campbell of Starchur
64th Foot, Maj. Hugh McLeroch

7th Brigade: Brig. Gen. Wm. Erskine, Quartermaster General
1st Battalion, 71st Foot, Maj. John Macdonnell of Lochgary
2nd Battalion, 71st Foot, Maj. Norman Lamont of Lamont

16th Light Dragoons, Lt. Col. William Harcourt
17th Light Dragoons, Lt. Col. Samuel Birch

Corps de Reserve: Lt. Gen. Earl Cornwallis
Brig. Gen. the Hon. John Vaughan
1st Battalion Grenadiers, Lt. Col. Hon. Henry Monckton
2nd Battalion Grenadiers, Lt. Col. William Medows
3rd Battalion Grenadiers, Maj. Thomas Marsh
4th Battalion Grenadiers, Maj. The Hon. Charles Stuart
33rd Foot, Lt. Col. James Webster
42nd Royal Highlander Regiment, Lt. Col. Thomas Stirling

Light Infantry Brigade: Brig. Gen. the Hon. Alexander Leslie
Brig. Maj. Lewis
1st Battalion Light Infantry, Maj. Thomas Musgrave; Lt. Col. Abernethy
2nd Battalion Light Infantry, Maj. Strawbenzie
3rd Battalion Light Infantry, Maj. the Hon. John Maitland
4th Battalion Light Infantry, Maj. John Johnson

Royal Artillery: Brig. Gen. Samuel Cleaveland
Brig. Maj. Farrington
1st Brigade of Artillery
2nd Brigade of Artillery
3rd Brigade of Artillery

Hessian Division: Lt. Gen. Leopold von Heister

Mirbach's Brigade: Maj. Gen. Werner von Mirbach
Knyphausen Regiment, Col. H. C. von Borck
Rall Regiment, Col. Rohann Rall
Lossberg Regiment, Col. H. A. von Heringen

Stirn's Brigade: Maj. Gen. J. D. von Stirn
Donop Regiment, Col. D. E. von Gosen
Mirbach Regiment, Col. Johann von Loos
Hereditary Prince Regiment, Col. C. W. von Hachenberg

Donop's Brigade: Col. Carl von Donop
Bloch Grenadier Battalion, Lt. Col. Justus von Bloch
Minnigerode Grenadier Battalion, Lt. Col. Friedrich von Minnigerode
Linsing Grenadier Battalion, Lt. Col. Otto von Linsing

Lossberg's Brigade: Col. A. H. von Lossberg
Ditfurth Regiment, Col. Carl von Bose
Trumbach Regiment, Col. C. E. von Bischausen

Feldjäger Corps, Col. Carl von Donop

APPENDIX E

The British Cabinet 1775-1776³²

First Lord of the Treasury: Lord North

Secretaries of State:

Northern Department: Earl of Suffolk

Southern Department: Earl of Rochford

Viscount Weymouth (from Nov. 1775)

For the American Colonies: Earl of Dartmouth

Lord George Germain (from Nov. 1775)

First Lord of the Admiralty: Earl of Sandwich

Lord President of the Council: Earl Gower

Lord Privy Seal: Duke of Grafton

Earl of Dartmouth (from Nov. 1775)

Lord Chancellor: Earl Bathurst

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Endnotes

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- ⁴ Mackesy, 27, 70.
- ⁵ David Hackett Fischer, *Washington's Crossing* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 74-75.
- ⁶ Mackesy, 33.
- ⁷ Fischer, 77-78.
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- ¹⁰ Carl Von Clausewitz, *On War*, ed. and trans. Micheal Howard and Peter Paret. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989), 595-596.
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- ¹⁷ Billias, 81-85.
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²⁰ McCullough, 65.

²¹ McCullough, 151.

²² Schechter, 121.

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²⁴ Schechter, 59-60.

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²⁶ Clausewitz, 88.

²⁷ John C. Fitzpatrick, ed. *The Writings of George Washington from the Original Manuscript Sources, 1745-1799*. (Washington D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1932.), VI:27-28.

²⁸ Gallagher, 76.

²⁹ Schechter, 133.

³⁰ Fischer, 385-388.

³¹ Fischer, 388-390.

³² Mackesy.